STAFF FORUM DISCUSSION SESSION SUMMARY

Topic: Working on Campus: Your thoughts?
Date/ Time: Wednesday 11th November 2020 at 1pm & Friday 13rd November 2020 at 1pm

Staff Forum Representatives welcomed colleagues to the discussion sessions and introduced the topic. The Staff Forum representatives explained that the discussion sessions will be hosted regularly so that colleagues can 'Get Heard' and express their thoughts and opinions on the chosen topics. The Staff Forum suggested that colleagues could put topic suggestions forward by emailing staff-forum@reading.ac.uk.

Colleagues in the discussion sessions were invited to share their experiences of working during the pandemic, whether they continued to work on campus during the lockdowns or whether they had worked from home. Other colleagues in the discussion session noted their experiences of the transition between working from home to campus or vice versa.

The discussion sessions covered the following themes:

- **Experiences of returning to working on campus**
- Positive comments were noted regarding signage, one-way systems, and cleaning materials/ hand sanitiser stations.
- Comments were noted regarding feeling safe on campus – including comments from colleagues who are student facing and teaching staff. There were also comments regarding positive student feedback.
- Comments were noted regarding staff feeling nervous about returning to campus, despite the training and resources available they were unable to 'picture' working on campus again. Some colleagues did specify that after they had been onto campus and seen things for themselves, they felt safer and happier to return to working on campus.
- Comments were made about Fire Warden and First Aid information. All security staff on campus are First Aid trained and it has been noted that all staff working on campus are encouraged to attend the Fire Warden training course on UoR Learn.
- Some colleagues mentioned that after 4pm the campus becomes very dark; it does not help with having motion sensor lights in the corridors giving the feeling of being alone.

- **Wellbeing / work life balance**
- The group discussed that working at home is not suitable for everyone (for many reasons i.e. their job role requires them to be on campus, they need specific equipment, they do not have a suitable work space at home, family commitments).
- Some colleagues noted that working from home has made a positive impact on their wellbeing and mentioned improvements in work life balance. There were comments about staff feeling more productive or less distracted whilst working at home. Other colleagues in the discussion sessions mentioned that they have been working longer hours or finding it difficult to break up working and home commitments.
- Some colleagues in the discussion session mentioned that working from home has been positive for them in terms of childcare/ care arrangements. The Chair of the Parent and Family Network reminded colleagues of the online coffee morning 2nd December 2020 at 11am; where more information about flexible working arrangements would be available.
- Some colleagues in the discussion session noted that their experience of working on campus has been lonely as they have not seen many other colleagues on campus when they

have been in. Some concerns were raised about lone working especially as buildings are now unlocked. A comment was made regarding thefts on campus and concerns about walking to the car parks in the darker winter evenings. Staff Forum representatives reminded colleagues that there is a lone working policy at the University and this type of concern can be raised with line management. The University Security team also offer a chaperone service if colleagues are worried about walking across campus later in the evenings etc. [Section 3.3]. http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/files/health-and-safety/CoP_07_Outside_normal_working_hours.pdf & http://www.reading.ac.uk/security-services/staying-safe/sec-chaperone-service.aspx

- **Flexible working**

- Some colleagues in the discussion session noted that they have enjoyed working from home but have also missed working on campus (most mentioning that they missed interaction with their colleagues) so they would like a flexible approach to working including some home working and some working on campus.
- Some colleagues noted positive experiences of technology use (Microsoft Teams) and the ability to work from anywhere. The group discussed different ways in which their teams have adapted and evolved to working in different locations. It was noted that we all have a part to play in the workings of the university and we have a responsibility to do our jobs whether we are at home or on campus.
- Some colleagues noted that working from home brought challenges within itself including remote access issues, IT connection problems, and did not have the best equipment issued to them to work from home. Therefore, working on campus with all available resources has its advantages.
- Some colleagues brought up the Financial advantages and disadvantages of working at home and at campus. We discussed that staff are entitled to claim tax relief on additional household expenses and it only takes a few minutes to complete: https://www.gov.uk/tax-relief-for-employees/working-at-home
- The group discussed that flexible working will only work if the University buy in to the 'blended' approach. The group discussed 'working from home stigma' and hoped that now most colleagues have had some experience of working from home there would be less stigma around this.

What colleagues in the discussion sessions have asked for:

- The Staff Forum to highlight the work of colleagues who have worked so hard on campus throughout the lock downs; especially those who have been working to set up a 'covid secure' experience on campus.
- Would it be possible for the university to create a video showing the measures that have been put in place for staff safety? This could be used to reassure members of staff who have not returned to campus.
- Clarity about the expectation for staff to return to working on campus.
- Will the university invest in more technology in meeting rooms? This would be useful for meetings where some members are in the meeting room on campus and others are joining in virtually.
- More open conversations with line managers about preferences for working from home and more regular meetings with their teams to ascertain what their colleagues are working on, who is on campus etc. bringing a sense of awareness on how your team are managing.

The Staff Forum representatives shared a slide with more information about the processes of raising concerns about returning to campus.

Returning to Campus

There is lots of information about returning to work on the staff portal, including the two risk assessments and guides in the Coronavirus FAQs on Staff Portal under:
http://www.reading.ac.uk/spsn-845740.aspx

If staff have any concerns about returning to campus, they should speak to their line manager or HR partner and complete an Occupational Health (OH) form. Once a form has been received by OH an appointment will be made to speak to one of the OH advisors who will discuss the individual's situation and options available. A report will then be passed on to the line manager and HR partner to suggest solutions.

OH website page:
https://www.reading.ac.uk/human-resources/working-at-reading/occupational-health

www.reading.ac.uk/us